

BOOKS IN REVIEW

Anti-Zionism as Ideology

WHAT PRICE ISRAEL? By ALFRED M. LILIENTHAL. Regnery. 274 pp. \$3.95.

Reviewed by MILTON HIMMELFARB

IDEOLOGY is thought that has suffered hardening of the arteries. It is what happens when the terrible simplifiers that Burckhardt warned us about get hold of a tradition and squeeze it into a closed system. The anti-Zionist tradition of classical Reform Judaism in America was represented by such thoughtful men as I. M. Wise, Kaufmann Kohler, and Samuel Goldenson. *What Price Israel?* is that tradition shrunk and distorted into an ideology.

When those men spoke about Jewish history or religion their interpretation or their emphasis could be disputed, but not their knowledge. In this book boner follows boner, page after page; the learning of the tradition has been succeeded by the pretentious ignorance of the ideologue. What would the *Protest-Rabbiner*, in this or any other country, have said about a statement that the Jews of the Book of Esther were "Judaist Persians"? For that matter, what would they have said about a book on contemporary political affairs which confuses Ernest Bevin and Aneurin Bevan?

It is characteristic of the ideologue that he has a low opinion of the intelligence of the ordinary run of men. That is why the author could allow himself to list Iran as an Arab country, immediately after telling us that "the Arab Land contains between 50 and 55% of the estimated crude oil reserve of the world." He must know that Iran is not an Arab country, a grade-school student knows that. He makes it an Arab country to enhance the importance of "Arab oil" and to lay the blame for the West's trouble in Iran at Israel's door, expecting that his sleight-of-hand will not be noticed. Ideological tendentiousness leads him to omit any suggestion that part of the

responsibility for the wretched situation of the Arab refugees belongs to the Arab governments. British scholars and churchmen who have long favored the Arab cause have condemned the Arab governments for cynically exploiting the plight of the refugees. We must assume that the author knows about this exploitation too, that he does not mention it because it would weaken his case against Israel and her American friends, and that he thinks of his readers as being too dull or uninformed to spot the omission. The same sort of thing can be said about his account of the recent history of the Jews in Iraq.

FOR your true ideologue, ends always justify means. Among the means used in this book is calumny. The author accuses a deceased high official of the United States government of a very grave offense, and gives no evidence for the accusation. He mentions Hitler and Weizmann in the same breath as racists. He describes a dissenting ambassador as "burying Count Bernadotte even before the UN mediator was killed by Zionist terrorists." He insinuates, despite Menahem Begin's denial, that the commander of the Irgun Tsevai Leumi was a Soviet agent. (If anything, Begin is a reactionary chauvinist.) Such an insinuation is calculated to suggest that the establishment of Israel was a Soviet plot, as is the application of the terms "front" and "fellow-traveler" to Israel's friends.

The paragraph immediately following, with its hints of mysteries, secrets, conspiracies, disloyalties, and all manner of sinister doings, is typical. "This book has been written, against the concerned counsel of many who are close and dear to me, because I feel I owe a duty to my country above any duty I owe my friends. The question 'What is a Jew?' is now intimately tied to the more important question 'How can we hold the Middle East?' My determination to complete this book was strengthened by the knowledge that no American Christian could, nor any Jew would, write it. Some of my material has been the subject of whispers, and I

decided it was time that muted talk be brought to the surface and be debated."

The author's excursus on the Khazars deserves special mention. He likes the theory—if it can be dignified with such a name—that European (and consequently American) Jews are mostly descended from this vanished Turkic people, whose rulers were converted to Judaism more than a thousand years ago. This notion has been advanced by the Arab League as a rebuttal of the Zionist argument that the Jews have a historical right to Palestine. In the United States the Khazars are a staple, not of anti-Zionist, but of downright anti-Semitic propaganda.

REALITY is the great enemy of ideology's Truth. Consequently ideology must abolish reality by ignoring it or denying it or standing it on its head. Jewish Palestine has been a major answer to the needs of persecuted Jews in the last twenty years. A man like Rabbi Irving F. Reichert, who may be said to represent the authentic tradition of anti-Zionism, concedes this reality and is grateful that persecuted Jews were able to find a home in Israel. (This does not prevent him from continuing to regard the Zionist program and philosophy as retrograde and cautioning against a too great emphasis on Israel in the thinking and activity of American Jews.) The author of this book does not concede the reality; he evades or denies it.

The anti-Zionist tradition, because it based itself on universal humanitarianism, wanted for the Arabs the human rights it wanted for all men. Anti-Zionist ideology, on the other hand, sympathizes with the Arabs only as they are opponents of Israel and Zionism. The author of this book, who has much to say about the injustices that Arabs have suffered in the struggle over Palestine, is otherwise quite unmoved by Arab needs or aspirations. He blames the United States for being anti-Arab on the Israel issue, but he does not blame us for being anti-Arab on the Tunisian issue. For North Africa he is interested only in an "amicable compromise"; his sole complaint is that our friendship for Israel makes us unacceptable as "a conciliator." The Neo-Destour movement (one of the few really promising movements in the Arab world) protests not against America's friendship for Israel, but against our approval of colonialism where it has the least excuse for being.

It loses us Arab support in the Middle East, the author writes, when Americans draw "sweeping . . . analogies between recent Soviet policies [the Prague trials and the accusations against the Moscow doctors] and the anti-Semitism of Hitler," because "nothing could please the Soviet Government more" in its attempts to win the Arabs over than to be called anti-Semitic by America. To reason that our frustration of justified Arab demands in North Africa does not hurt us in the Middle East, but that our condemnation of Soviet anti-Semitism does—this is the crazy logic of ideology. So is the denunciation of the successful Jewish effort to obtain restitution and indemnification from Western Germany. In the author's eyes this is racism; the German state is the rightful heir of the Jews it murdered.

He laments the damage that he thinks Zionism and sympathy for Israel have done to Judaism. But what's Judaism to him, or he to Judaism? He likes Toynbee's characterization of Zionism as "a fragment of a fossil," the fossil being Judaism. Contemplating "the history of Judaism—an experience in which the religious substance and the nationalist shadow blend most confusingly," he finds that "in historic reality, Judaism has shrunk to a nationalist rite" and that "the 'chosen people' concept smothered universality." We conclude that he is at his most consistent when he approves Koestler's definition of the Jewish alternative (though he blurs Koestler's second term): go to Israel, or stay where you are and stop being Jews. It is not hard to imagine what a Kohler would have said about all this.

NOWHERE does this book show its astigmatism more than in its notion of America and Americanism. American Jews are warned not to have "a foreign policy separate from that of Methodists or Episcopalians. The country cannot afford such a dichotomy." But Americans know that Methodists and Episcopalians do have separate "foreign policies" in this sense, just as the Lutherans and Catholics have. In the great debate between interventionists and isolationists before Pearl Harbor, most Episcopalians were on the interventionists' side and most Lutherans on the other side. Methodists and Catholics have rather different foreign policies on the issue of posting a United States ambassador to the Vatican. When Catholic diocesan newspapers print on their front pages the text of the agreement between the United States and

Franco for bases in Spain, that is one indication of a Catholic preference in United States foreign policy. Episcopalians are as characteristically Anglophile as Irish Catholics are Anglophobe. The predilection of most American Jews for Israel is very much the same kind of thing, and so is the mistrust of most American Jews for Germany. There is nothing wrong, much less sinister, about it. So far from being un-American, it is very American. The author underrates American respect for diversity.

One reads the book, puts it down, and wonders. Surely it is possible to be critical of Israel's handling of the Arab problem, and to oppose Zionism as a doctrine and a movement, without backing into this dead-end, in this dubious neighborhood.

Hunting Groundhogs

THE MARMOT DRIVE. By JOHN HERSEY.
KNOPF. 273 pp. \$3.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM S. POSTER

MR. HERSEY'S latest work offers a marked and somewhat baffling contrast to his previous output. In such works as *A Bell for Adano*, *The Wall*, or even *Hiroshima*, Mr. Hersey moved carefully about on the neatly outlined beachheads of big political issues and humanitarian sentiments and brought forth some well-constructed, skillfully executed, and pleasing books even if they were, essentially, journalistic mirages—structures of fact, ideology, and sentiment with no real location in the painful and complex world of actual human experience. *The Marmot Drive* is an amorphous and confused production, one that will probably not attract the large audience of the previous works or give anyone the impression that an act of ennobling humanitarian piety has been performed merely by reading it. Yet, in terms of literature, it is easily the most interesting of Mr. Hersey's books, the only one, as far as I know, that makes an effort to say something new and something real.

The Marmot Drive deals with the affairs of "Tunxis," a small, out-of-the-way community in Connecticut. Mr. Hersey makes much of its strange juxtapositions of centuries and customs, the fact that television sets and candlesticks are used in the same house, gasoline stations and whipping posts exist side by side, and the very same conversation contains the

latest neologisms and such quaint survivals as "raise high tantrabogus," "betwattled after," "I swan," and just about every rural expression you ever heard except "by cracky." The odor of rural New England is also exuded, somewhat over-thickly, from a mass of names such as Eben Avered, Pliny Forward, Dorcas Thrall, Roswell Coit, Mrs. Dearthick, Anak Welch, Romeo Bacon, a "girl from the city named Hester." But, then, to some degree, Mr. Hersey's intentions are patently allegorical and some of the names decipher easily enough: Pliny Forward is the learned and progressive young man of the town, Roswell Coit is a lascivious lout, Dorcas Thrall a patient spinster, Mrs. Dearthick a believer in poverty, Anak Welch goes back on his commitment, and Hester is Hawthorne's Scarlet Lady happily revived to give us some telling insights into a host of rotting, inadequate, or bewildered males through their relation to her free-floating sexuality. The exact significance, if any, of the name of her fiancé, Eben Avered, escapes me and perhaps some of the allegory along with it.

It is with Eben that Hester arrives in Tunxis to meet his father, Matthew, the Selectman of the small town which has been left behind by the modern world and the center of its conflicting passions, fantasies, ambitions, and resentments. Selectman Avered is busy marshaling the townsfolk for a drive against a teeming colony of woodchucks, groundhogs, or marmots that have become audacious and threaten, at least in the heated imagination of the Selectman, to infiltrate the town and dispossess its inhabitants. Anak Welch, six and a half feet of philosophic farmer, sums up the necessity for the drive in a manner that lets us in on the larger import of this eruption of anxiety:

"D'you know the way sweet honeysuckle gets on a tree that lets itself get weak and overwhelms it and kills it by-and-by? That's what's beginning in my opinion with the woodchucks. They calculate that Tunxis is on the wane, that's the way I see it, and they're movin' in on us, they'd be glad to nudge us out altogether.

"We humans think we're pretty high-soarin' with our combustion engines and electric radios and now jimmyin' open the almighty secret itself, splittin' God to make explosions, but what we forget is that we're still part of the woodlot where it grows rank and